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AMERICAN NEAR EAST SOCIETY

MONOGRAPH SERIES

Number 1

HISTORY OF THE ARABS

In Three Parts

Part I

October 1948

Published by the American Near East Society
46 Cedar Street, New York 5, N.Y.

(Additional copies 25¢ each)

OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE ARABS
(See Notes 1 and 2)

PART I - ANCIENT ARABIA AND THE BEGINNING OF THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT

ANCIENT ARABIA

Peoples of the Arabian Peninsula

Before the dawn of history, the Arabian Peninsula was peopled by cave men. For want of a better name they may be called members of the Mediterranean group.

In historic times the Semitic Race emerged from the darkness of the earlier period. The early Chaldaeans and Babylonians, the Assyrians and Phoenicians, the Jews and Canaanites, the Amorites and Aramaeans, were all branches of the Semitic Race. Their languages were intimately related and they came from the same type of nomadic and tribal background. Their primitive life was largely centered around the black tent, the palm tree and the camel.

To the north these Semitic tribes waged wars and intermarried with invaders from Central Asia and Europe. The pure Semitic stock became corrupted by centuries of contact with Hurri and Mitanni, Hittites and Philistines, Sumerians and Persians, Scythians and Tartars, Greeks and Romans, Franks and Circassians.

At the southern end of the Peninsula there had been an age long infiltration of black people from Africa. Sometimes they came as invaders but more often as slaves. It is likely that there are still traces of aborigines who were driven into the barren southern hills by the more virile Semitic tribes of prehistoric times.

Just as the Jewish diaspora brought many Hebrew families into Egypt, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, so it scattered thousands of Jews

Note 1

See Table A Appendix for Chronological Table

Note 2

If anyone wishes to supplement the information contained in this brief outline by extra reading, the following books are recommended:-

"History of the Arabs,"	Philip K. Hitti,	Macmillan & Co., 1940.
"Life of Mahomet,"	Sir William Muir,	John Grant, 1861, revised 1923.
"Annals of the Early Caliphate,"	Sir William Muir,	Smith, Elder & Co., 1883.
"The Arab Awakening,"	George Antonius,	Lippincott, 1939.
"A Literary History of the Arabs,"	R. A. Nicholson,	Fisher Unwin, Ltd., 1907.

throughout Arabia. The old town of Yathrib, which Ptolemy called Jathrippa and which the Muslims call al-Madinah, was largely Jewish. Other large colonies were formed in Tayma in the north, San'a in al-Yaman, and Khaybar, north of Madinah.

The Arabian tribes split into two divisions which have persisted throughout history, although it is impossible to know just what the basis for the division was in pre-historic times. These groups were Qahtan (Joktan of the Bible), who settled in the livable parts of the south, and 'Adnan, the Arabized peoples of the north. Both of these divisions were Semitic and should not be confused with non-Semitic aborigines or invaders.

The Age of Ignorance (Al-Jahiliyah)

The Semitic peoples were very important in ancient times as their territories formed the link between Asia, Europe and Africa. Civilization largely developed in what we think of as the "Arab lands" where a warm climate and active trade made progress possible. Even before the time of the First Dynasty the Egyptians procured copper from the mines of Sinai, purchased frankincense for their worship and carried on trade with Arabia. Egypt sent fleets to bring gold from East Africa which made it necessary for them to control the Red Sea. As Egypt became powerful, her relationships with Arabia in general and with Sinai in particular became closer.

The great conquerors of Assyria, Babylon and Persia had many contacts with Arabia, especially with the tribes of the north. Nabonidys was at Tayma in Arabia when Cyrus destroyed his capital at Babylon.

Solomon exploited copper mines in Edom. His smelter has been found on the plain near 'Aqabah. He maintained a fleet in the Gulf of 'Aqabah and brought gold from the south. The Queen of Sheba, Bilqis, was evidently the daughter of an Arabian chief, who commercial dealings with the Jews.

During Hellenic times the Nabataean tribes built up a strong kingdom in North Arabia with the rock fortress of Petra as their principal stronghold. During the reign of Augustus in 24 B.C. Aelius Gallus tried to invade Arabia with ten thousand men but the expedition was unsuccessful.

In Classic times the land was divided into three principal sections; Arabia Felix, the independent land to the south, Arabia Deserta, including the northern desert which was under partial Persian control, and Arabia Petraea, which comprised Sinai and the Nabataean Kingdom which was in close contact with Rome.

The South

In the more fertile parts of Southern Arabia the Minaean Kingdom controlled the incense traffic and caravan trade from about 1300 to 650 B.C. Meanwhile the Sabaeen tribes became strong and during the period of the Persian Empire were in power in South Arabia, with

their capital at Ma'rib, between the Yaman and Hadramawt, a city famous for its irrigation works and great dam.

The Sabaeans developed trade with India and the South, transshipping the goods which came by sea to caravans that went north to Palestine and Syria. They also sent frankincense, pearls, spices and other products of Arabia by caravan to the north.

About 115 B.C. close relatives of the Sabaeans, known as Himyarites, ruled South Arabia, with Zafar (Sephar of Genesis 10:30) their capital. They maintained close relations with Abyssinia.

At the time of Justinian, when the Prophet was born, the Byzantine Empire aided the Abyssinians to invade and rule South Arabia. The Himyarite chiefs became allied to Sassanid Persia. The bursting of the dam at Ma'rib and the Abyssinian invasion drove many of the Southern tribes to the north where they eventually joined the Islamic movement.

The religion of South Arabia was devoted to worship of the heavenly bodies and was connected with ideas of fertility, though Jewish and Christian influences played an important role at certain periods. There was a Christian center at Najran and the Abyssinian invaders built a cathedral at San'a which became their capital.

The North

While the Sabaeans and Himyarites were ruling the South, the Nabataean tribes (al-Anbat) gradually displaced the Hurris (Horites) and Edomites (Idumaeans) of Southern Trans-Jordan making Petra their capital. They grew so powerful during the Hellenistic and Roman periods that they largely controlled the caravan trade. At the time of Christ they ruled Baalbek and Damascus. In 105 A.D. the Emperor Trajan conquered their kingdom and turned it into the Roman province of Arabia.

When Petra fell Palmyra (Tadmur), situated to the north between Syria and Mesopotamia, rose to power. Profiting by the long peace, which permitted trade between Rome and Persia, it became so powerful that its queen, Zenobia, ruled the East from Alexandria to Angora, until Aurelian destroyed Palmyra and in triumph led Zenobia to Rome in 272 A.D.

At the time of the Abyssinian conquest of the South, the Ghasanids (Banu Ghassan) moved to the Syrian desert and aided the Byzantines by forming a Christian buffer state between Syria and Persia.

Likewise the Lakhmids (Banu-Lakhmid) moved to the edge of 'Iraq, where they became allied to the Sassanid Kings of Persia, with al-Hirah as their capital.

During this period the powerful tribe of Kindah controlled the central portions of the Arabian Peninsula in alliance with the kings of the South.

At the time of the Prophet's birth Arabia was weak and torn between foreign powers. The Byzantine Emperors were using the Abyssinians and the Ghassanids as pawns, while the Sassanid Kings of Persia were trying to undermine the Byzantines by backing the Himyarites to the south and the Lakhmids in the North. The stage was set for a new power to gain control.

RISE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

The Prophet Muhammad

Although the central parts of Arabia and the Hijaz remained largely nomadic, the Quraysh (Koreish) Tribe developed an important settlement at Makkah (Mecca). A fair for the Bedouin trade was held once a year at 'Ukaz near Makkah. The Zamzam well became the site of a shrine which contained the sacred Black Stone. The little temple was called the Ka'bah (Kaaba) and was sacred to Allah, Hubal, al-Uzza (Venus) and other deities. This sanctuary served as a place of pilgrimage, a refuge and an oracle where the soothsayer drew arrows for the purpose of divination. The Quraysh grew rich enough from their fair and their shrine to become important bankers and underwriters of caravan expeditions.

Muhammad was born about 571 A.D., when Justinian was backing the Abyssinian invasion of Southern Arabia. As his father, who belonged to the Quraysh Tribe, died before he was born his influential uncle, Abu-Talib, cared for and raised him. Muhammad accompanied a number of caravans and at the age of twenty-five married a wealthy widow, Khadijah. She not only made him materially independent, but encouraged him to believe in voices and visions, which called him to be a prophet.

He summoned his people to monotheism and moral living and emphasized the importance of hell and paradise. The people of Makkah persecuted him as their income depended largely upon the idolatry and immorality of the pilgrims who came to their shrine. Thus, only a few kinsmen and low born people became his followers. Some of these fled to Abyssinia. Finally, an invitation came for the rest to migrate to Yathrib.

In 622 A.D. the Hijrah (Hegira) took place when Muhammad and some two hundred followers fled to Yathrib, which became known as al-Madinah. The friends who migrated from Makkah were known as al-Sahabis and the supporters at al-Madinah as Ansars. The Prophet established a place for communal worship near his house and his blind slave called the people to prayer. His divinely inspired utterances established the laws and customs of the new community and, after his death, were written down by his followers to form the Quran.

The Muslim community stormed a Makkan caravan at Badr in 624. The next year the Makkans defeated the Muslims at Uhud near al-Madinah. In 627 Muhammad saved al-Madinah from another attack by digging a trench.

The Prophet had expected the Jews of Yathrib to receive him as their Messiah. When he found that they could not accept his religious ideas and were siding against him he drove many of them from their lands in Yathrib, al-Madinah, and Khaybar, thereby increasing the wealth of the Muslim community.

In 628 Muhammad attacked Makkah and made the peace of al-Hudaybiyah with the Quraysh. When the tribes witnessed his rapid success, their chiefs came to him to swear allegiance in order to be sure to have him as their friend. In 632 Muhammad went to Makkah on what was known as the Farewell Pilgrimage, for three months later he was dead.

In ten years time he had set up a theocratic state which ended the chaos of tribal raiding. He had substituted for the immoral pantheism of ancient times a new monotheism which seemed puritanical to the Arabs of his day.

When the people of al-Madinah learned that the Prophet was dead they gathered at their little mosque in fear and despair. Abu Bakr mounted the pulpit and told them that Muhammad was dead, but that "God liveth and dieth not". He was chosen by the people as the first successor (Khalifah or caliph) of Muhammad and the head of the new state.

The Rashidun - First Four Orthodox Caliphs

Abu Bakr, 632 - 634 (called "al-Siddiq"), became the first of four orthodox caliphs who were instrumental in uniting Islam and causing its influence to spread throughout the world. He was the father of 'A'ishah, the Prophet's favorite wife after Khadijah died. He had been one of the first to accept Islam, was the intimate friend of Muhammad and an old man noted for his piety. During his rule and largely due to the courage of his general, Khalid ibn-al-Walid, rebellious tribes were subjugated and Islam established in central Arabia.

'Umar ibn-al-Khattab, 634 - 644, another old and pious friend of the Prophet's, was the natural successor to Abu Bakr. He retained ascetic simplicity in spite of the fact that during his regime Islam became one of the great empires of the world.

The Byzantine Emperor Heraclius had just delivered Syria and Palestine from a Persian invasion but had not yet had time to reorganize the land. Profiting by this situation the general, Khalid ibn-al-Walid, took Damascus in 635 and helped the main Muslim army defeat the Byzantine forces a year later in the Valley of the Yarmuk, east of the Sea of Galilee.

All of Palestine and Syria soon fell to the Muslims. 'Umar himself took charge of the entry into Jerusalem, which proved to be as much a pilgrimage as a military invasion.

Meanwhile, in 637 A.D., the general Sa'd ibn-abi-Waqqas defeated the army of the Sassanid King of Persia at al-Qadisiyah.

A few months later he entered the Persian capital, Ctesiphon (al-Mada'in), not far from the modern Baghdad. Before the end of 'Umar's reign, the whole of Persia and Makran or Baluchistan had been subjugated.

A new military camp called al-Kufah was established in 'Iraq about ninety miles south of where Baghdad was later to be built. This settlement became the capital of the Eastern provinces.

In the meantime another general, named 'Amr ibn-al-'As, conquered Egypt, making the military camp at al-Fustat (Old Cairo) his capital.

'Uthman, 644 - 656. After the murder of 'Umar, still another old friend of the Prophet, 'Uthman ibn-Affan, became Caliph. He appointed 'Abdullah as Viceroy of Egypt and entrusted the administration of Syria to Mu'awiyah. These two able rulers learned how to build fleets for the Arabs and conquered both Cyprus and Rhodes. Western Persia and part of Armenia, as well as a section of North Africa, were added to the Muslim state.

'Uthman was old and weak. He lacked 'Umar's rugged honesty and gave way to nepotism. Other leaders became jealous and in 656 A.D. a band of rebels killed him in his own house at al-Madinah.

'Ali ibn-abi-Talib, 656 - 661, was the Prophet's first cousin; he married the Prophet's daughter, Fatimah, and was the father of the Prophet's only two surviving grandsons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn. He was one of the first believers, a man famous for his piety and the natural candidate to become the fourth Caliph.

In 656 A.D., near al-Basrah, he defeated Talhah and al-Zubayr, two of his powerful rivals. 'A'ishah, the Prophet's widow, also sided against 'Ali. As she rode a camel, this encounter was called "The Battle of the Camel."

'Ali made al-Kufah, in 'Iraq, rather than al-Madinah, his capital. He soon found that his strongest rival was Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria. He was the son of Abu Sufyan, the richest banker of Makkah and the leading member of the noble family of Umayyah, a second cousin of the Prophet's grandfather.

In 657 A.D. the Battle of Siffin started on the west bank of the Euphrates, east of Aleppo. Mu'awiyah's soldiers fastened Qurans to their lances and persuaded 'Ali to accept arbitration. Four years of uncertainty followed, during which a dangerous sect of discontented people, known as Kharijites, (Seceders), sprang up. One of them killed 'Ali at al-Kufah in 661 A.D. The holy city of al-Najaf in 'Iraq then was built and there 'Ali was buried.

The Islamic Sects

These events divided Islam into two parties which exist to this day, the Sunni and the Shi'ah.

A - The Sunni, or the so called orthodox party, accepted Mu'awiyah as the next Caliph and held to the simple teachings of the Arab Muslims. This group was located in Syria, Palestine, Arabia, Egypt and North Africa.

In the course of time the Sunni branch of Islam became divided into four systems of legal interpretation:

1. The School of Malik (715-795 A.D.) which grew up at al-Madinah and which was a strict and conservative interpretation of tradition, although it did recognize "ijma'" or consensus of opinion;
2. The School of Abu Hanifah (died 767 A.D.), which was the progressive school of 'Iraq and permitted departure from tradition by "istihsan" on the grounds of equity. The Ottoman Empire, India and Central Asia adopted the teachings of this School;
3. The School of al-Shafi'i (767-820), who ended his life at Cairo. It was a compromise between the progressive ideas of Abu Hanifah and the conservative of Malik. Parts of Egypt, Africa, Palestine, South Arabia and the East Indies follow al-Shafi'i;
4. The School of Ibn Hanbal (died at Baghdad 855 A.D.), a "Back to the Prophet" movement, used by the Wahhabis and other reactionary groups.

B - The Shi'ah (Shiites) sect, which regarded 'Ali and his sons as the only proper successors to the Prophet, canonized them as saints and regarded them as almost as important as the Prophet himself. This party used to be and still is the leading sect of 'Iraq, Persia and parts of India. It lost much of its Arab character and became imbued with mystical Persian ideas and rites. Many of its members became extremists who defied 'Ali and carried on secret political intrigues.

Instead of accepting the official caliphs, the Shi'ah secretly recognized Imams, who were descendants of 'Ali. In turn the followers of these Imams often set up separate and distinct sects.

The Twelve Imams of the Shi'ah were: (1) 'Ali, (2) Hasan, and (3) Husayn, his sons, (4) 'Ali Zayn al-'abidin, (5) Muhammad al-Baqir, (6) Ja'far al-Sadiq, (7) Musa al-Kazim, who lived at the end of the 8th Century, (8) 'Ali al-Rida, (9) Muhammad al-Jawad, (10) 'Ali al-Hadi, (11) al-Hasan al-'Askari, (12) Muhammad al-Muntazar, who is to reappear as the Shi'ah messiah or Mahdi.

The people of al-Yaman regarded Zayd, rather than Muhammad al-Baqir as the successor of the IV Imam and formed a separate sect known as "Zaydites". A much larger group believed that Ja'far al-Sadiq was the last official Imam to die and that his son Isma'il, rather than Musa al-Kazim, was the true successor, who would remain alive to re-appear as the Mahdi. As Isma'il was thus the seventh Imam, this group was sometimes called the "Seveners" or sometimes the "Isma'iliyah." As time went on they developed a secret religious and political system which resulted in a number of important movements such as the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt, the Qarmatian state on the Persian Gulf, the Assassins of the Crusader period and the Druzes and Nusayris ('Alaouites) of Lebanon and Syria.

Administration of the Islamic State

The Caliph administered the government through provincial governors to whom it was necessary to delegate great military and civil control. The Arab armies gave the "People of the Book", that is the Christians, Jews and Sabaceans, the choice of adopting the new faith or of paying tribute. The Believers did army service, managed the government and received booty, whereas the conquered peoples paid tribute, served as employees and worked the soil.

The Muslim legal system was built up on the basis of the Quran, the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet), and such traditions as existed until the four great schools developed in the 8th and 9th centuries.

For some time the financial matters were entrusted to members of the conquered races who continued to form the civil service. The arts and crafts, the science and medicine, the trade and secretarial work were also conducted by the Dhimmis, or subject peoples, as the Arabs were unfamiliar with such matters.

On the other hand, the less cultured Arabs formed the aristocracy. Relatives of the Prophet and early leaders received huge pensions and the provincial rulers fell into the temptation of enjoying the luxury of the peoples whom they conquered. Conquest and wealth brought slaves and ease, so that the old virility of the nomads tended to be weakened by city life. The Caliph and his governors exerted great influence by speaking at the mosque prayers, much as modern statesmen speak over the radio. The poets aroused the emotions of the people so that government officials tried to control them.

In time the Quran and Hadith came to be collected in officially accepted forms, great schools of law developed, the Arabs themselves devised an efficient financial system, and their learning was published in the Arabic language. Great cities were built, the rulers established courts of an oriental type, toleration and license took the place of the early reform spirit, and the unity of the Islamic state often turned into division and strife.

TABLE A APPENDIX

1300 B.C.	Minaean Kingdom in South Arabia	13th Cent. B.C. Ramses in Egypt Jewish tribes settle Palestine.
650 B.C.	Sabaeen Kingdom in South Arabia, surpassing Minaean.	7th Cent. B.C. Collapse of Assyrian Empire. Kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon.
115 B.C.	Himyarite Kingdom in South Arabia, replacing Sabaeen. The Nabataean tribes controlled North Arabia with Petra as their capital.	Ptolemies in Egypt, Seleucids at Antioch. Marius, the leader at Rome. Great period of the Roman Empire.
525-575 A.D.	Abyssinians controlled South Arabia	Justinian Emperor at Constantinople and Chosroes king of Persia.
570 (571) A.D.	Prophet Muhammad born.	
622 A.D.	The Hijrah, Muslims fled from Makkah to al-Madinah	627 A.D. Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians and ended their invasion of Syria
632 A.D.	Death of the Prophet Muhammad.	
661 A.D.	Mu'awiyah founded the Umayyad Caliphate at Damascus.	Period of great Muslim conquests.
750 A.D.	Fall of the Umayyad Caliphate and founding of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in 'Iraq.	732 A.D. Charles Martel defeated the Arabs at Tours. 752 A.D. Pippin King of the Franks.
786-809 A.D.	Harun al-Rashid Caliph	768-814 A.D. Charlemagne King
909 A.D.	Fatimid rule in North Africa.	
945 A.D.	Saljuk regime at Baghdad	1066 A.D. William the Conqueror invaded England.
1094 A.D.	The Crusades began.	
1171 A.D.	Saladin ended the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt	Philip Augustus King of France. Richard Coeur de Lion King of England.

1258 A.D.	Destruction of Baghdad by Hulagu.	1215 A.D.	Magna Carta.
1260 A.D.	Baybars Sultan of Egypt	End of the Crusading Period.	
1401 A.D.	Timur's invasions.		
1453 A.D.	Muhammad II invaded Constantinople	About 1450	Gutenberg started printing.
1492 A.D.	Fall of Granada in Spain	1492 A.D.	Discovery of America.
1517 A.D.	The Ottoman Sultan established Turkish rule over the entire Near East.	1533 A.D.	Henry VIII separated the Church of England from Rome.
1747 A.D.	Wahhabi movement became powerful in Arabia.	1756-1763 A.D.	Seven Years War.
1798 A.D.	Napoleon occupied Egypt	1789 A.D.	French Revolution.
1805-1849 A.D.	Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt	1804 A.D.	Napoleon, Emperor
(1832-1840)	his son Ibrahim Pasha in Syria	1815 A.D.	Battle of Waterloo.
1830 A.D.	French occupation of Algeria.	1837 A.D.	Victoria, Queen of England.
1864 A.D.	Lebanon autonomous.	1852 A.D.	Napoleon III, Emperor
1884 A.D.	British administration established in Egypt.	1861-1865 A.D.	U.S. Civil War
1916 A.D.	Grand Sharif Husayn of Makkah revolted	1870 A.D.	Franco-Prussian War.
1918 A.D.	Lord Allenby and the Amir Faysal separated the Arab lands from Turkey.	1914-1918 A.D.	World War
1926 A.D.	Abdul Aziz es-Saud Ibn Saud proclaimed king of Saudi-Arabia.	1920 A.D.	San Remo Conference Mandates established.
1930 A.D.	Iraq made independent.		
1936 A.D.	Egypt made independent.		
1945 A.D.	Formation Arab League	1939-'45 A.D.	World War II
		1945 A.D.	San Francisco Conference and Establishment of U.N.

1946 A.D. Evacuation of foreign
troops and establishment
of complete independence
in Syria and Lebanon.
Transjordan made independent.

1947 A.D. U.N. decision to
partition Palestine.

1948 A.D. Termination of the
British Mandate and
formation of state of
Israel.

MAP OF ARABIA



